REFLECTIONS on a photo that may be Mary E. Vail 1858-1870

by Jeffrey Hunt
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This small and striking portrait measures just 2½ by 4 inches. The photographer, J. R. Daggett of Roseburg, Oregon, is listed at the bottom. Based on a notice in the *Roseburg Ensign* dated August 21, 1869, we know Daggett operated a short-lived studio on Jackson Street during that year. The card stock, print style, and oval vignette all support this narrow dating window.

I found this listing through the Historic Photo Archive website, which appears to be the only source with concrete information on Daggett's brief career. The Oregon Historical Society lists one photo by him, but it lacks a date and offers no further context.

This image comes from the Vail Dear Steel Box — a small family archive passed down through Thurman Deer's family. Given that this collection of photos likely belonged to his parents, Allen J. Dear and Fannie A. Vail, there's reason to believe the young girl pictured here may be Mary E. Vail, born in 1858, who died young in 1870. The age of the girl in the photo — perhaps around ten or slightly older — is consistent with this possibility. The studio's 1869 operation also fits the proposed date range.

Though there's no definitive identification or burial record yet located for Mary E. Vail, and the attribution remains tentative, the circumstantial evidence — family provenance, photographer's location and date, and the girl's apparent age — all point toward her. Another image from the same photographer in this collection may be a post-mortem portrait, which could further support this connection.

If so, this may be the only surviving likeness of Mary E. Vail — a rare and intimate window into a short life and a nearly forgotten corner of Oregon's early history.